DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 141 327 SP 011 206

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TITLE A Bicentennial Horizons Project: The "Mini"-Sabbatical Concept.
PUB DATE 76
NOTE 8p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Faculty; Curriculum Development; Inservice Education; *Interinstitutional Cooperation; Interschool Communication; *Professional Continuing Education; Program Development; *Sabbatical Leaves; Self Evaluation; *Teacher Improvement
IDENTIFIERS South Dakota State University

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the purpose and function of the "mini-sabbatical" for college faculty. This short term sabbatical is of one week duration. During this period the teacher visits an educational institution other than his own with the object of observing, interviewing, and discussing his field of interest with faculty members interested in the same subject but perhaps with different or new approaches. An example is given of such a visit with an evaluation of the resulting benefits for the teacher involved. (JD)

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A Bicentennial Horizons Project

# The "Mini"-Sabbatical Concept

(J. L. Foreman)

Because there is a constant need for in-service education for educators at all levels and because of the limited amount of available funds for full or half-time sabbaticals, a "mini" or short-term sabbatical policy was proposed and adopted as a Bicentennial project at South Dakota State University in 1974. Written policy statements for the SDSU "Mini"-Sabbatical program include the following as the "Objectives":

> "To enhance the quality of the instructional program by adding an outside dimension to the individual creativeness of university faculty members. This will be accomplished by a visitation of those institutions recognized as having success in a new program, a different approach to course content, new classroom or laboratory techniques, a restructured curriculum or success in student retention or services."

The written policy also states that the number of sabbaticals shall not exceed 20 at a maximum of $500 each. The short-term sabbatical shall be one week maximum duration with the funds o be used for travel and per diem. Faculty members wishing to participate in this program must submit copies of a proposal through channels to the President's office prior to a specified date. Proposals should include rationale, objectives, plans and a budget. They should relate to a particular discipline or be university-wide in scope, (such as,

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developments in grading, instructor improvement, organization, use of teaching aids, new methods and success in retention programs). Sabbaticals shall be awarded by the president of the institution upon the advice of the President's Advisory Committee.

The "mini"-sabbatical concept has proven to be an effective means for self improvement, for program development, and for ways to exchange ideas. Since the program has been in effect at SDSU, twenty staff members have had proposals approved and awarded. They represented a variety of disciplines and provided opportunities for visits with educators and studies of programs on campuses of institutions throughout the United States. Examples of recipients and the purposes of their "mini"-sabbaticals in capsule form are as follows:

David Evans, Associate Professor in English--examine the creative writing program at San Francisco College.

R. A. Higgins, Associate Professor of Electrical Engineering--visit the Electrical Engineering and Computer Science Department at the University of California, Berkeley.

Paul Middaugh, Professor of Microbiology--visit the Anaerobe Laboratory, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg.

Darwin Walker, Associate Professor of Music--study organizational activities surrounding University of Houston instrumental music program.

Cathy Walters, Instructor in Child Development and Family Relations--study student teacher evaluation,

toddler lab and professional development in Child Development Department at Tuft's University, Medford, Massachusetts.

The maximum cost for this project for the twenty participants has been less than $10,000. Funds for the project have been derived from university sources or foundations interested in staff development. The greatest benefits were accrued by the staff members who received the sabbaticals; however, the exchange of ideas involved has a lot to offer the home institutions and the ones visited.

In order to present a better description of the "mini"-sabbatical concept, a proposal that has been accepted and completed, is submitted as an example. In October, 1975, the author of this article (employed as the Supervisor of Graduate Education at SDSU) submitted a proposal that was selected by the President of the University and funded. For a long time it was felt that for the Division of Education at SDSU to achieve a greater amount of success in its graduate programs it must establish its commitment to research as well as continue the high level of instruction already established. One way to assist the Divisional staff members to make this commitment would be to visit an institution that was highly successful in that area.

Plans were made to spend one week making an intensive study of the Graduate program in the College of Education at Memphis State University. That program was chosen for the sabbatical because it is highly respected and because staff members involved in the graduate program were in the process of strengthening their commitment to research at that Institution at that particular time. Preliminary plans were made with the Dean of the College of Education at MSU for a systematic visit of all aspects of

the graduate programs in Education at that Institution. A detailed questionnaire and a list of probable issues for discussion were prepared prior to the visit. Related bulletins, evaluation instruments, brochures, and ocher information concerning the (SDSU) Division of Education's program were brought along to better facilitate an exchange of ideas. A list of people to interview and a daily schedule for the visits were prepared prior to the visit by the Dean of the College of Education at MSU.

It was discovered that if one follows a well planned and organized schedule and has a good list of topics to discuss, much can be accomplished in one week. Approximately twenty people were interviewed. The list included the president, deans, department heads, staff members, graduate students, Memphis city school administrators and teachers. During the interview a questionnaire was used which included the following major topics: curricula, faculty, students resources and facilities for advanced programs; evaluation, program review and planning and miscellaneous concerns; and major school problems and issues of today. Excellent rapport was established in each interview and in most cases both parties were jotting down notes and exchanging materials for future reference.

A vacant office was set aside for the visitor to use after each interview and other periods of time so that notes and materials could be organized, edited, and summarized throughout the week. A final interview was arranged between the visitor and the Dean of the College of Education for the sake of clarification, organization, and summarization of the wealth of materials and information collected in that short period of time.

A written report was completed during the two weeks following the sabbatical and copies were distributed and circulated on campuses at both institutions. The written report included the "mini"-sabbatical policy statement, the application and proposal for the short-term sabbatical, a copy of the questionnaire and list of discussion topics used in interviews, a schedule and list of people interviewed, written policy statements and program descriptions collected from MSU during the visit, an informational summary of the interviews and visit, and conclusions, suggestions, and implications of the study. The following are random samples of conclusions, suggestions, and implications taken from the original written report:

1. Curriculum development is a continuous process in the College of Education at MSU. The continuous planned program development concept not only improves programs but gives valuable pre-service and in-service experience for all people involved. The standing Curricular Committee approach for each department and for the college at large seems to function efficiently and could be used at any institution.
2. There seems to be a need on both campuses for better communications among levels of staff and administration; and for openness in discussion and record keeping in regard to tenure, salary, promotion, and work-load policies for personnel. A good staff is the most important ingredient in the successful functioning of any institution. Policies that affect the welfare and functioning of staff members are very difficult to

administer. However, staff problems are limited if personnel are informed and are asked to help make decisions concerning personnel merit for salary changes, tenure status, promotion possibilities and advancement potential. It is very difficult for a staff member to improve himself and to remain productive if he is not informed about the reasons for not being promoted, for not being placed on tenure, or for receiving little or no salary increase based on merit. All institutions should have a good due-process policy.

3. Work loads for staff and administrators seem to be heavy on both campuses. There is more pressure on research publications at MSU than at SDSU; however, the teaching load or its equivalent appears to be heavier at SDSU. The staff at both institutions are engaged in a variety of action research projects. The staff at SDSU should be encouraged and given time and resources to describe these activities in written form for publication or presentation at regional and national conferences.
4. There is a tendency on both campuses to allow or even encourage an overload for efficient and willing faculty members.
5. The Departments in the College of Education at MSU have a variety of ways to evaluate, review, and plan programs for graduates. Some use follow-up studies regularly and others use them periodically. Evaluation results are definitely used in program development.

The above is a small sample of the conclusions and implications found in the written report and in the collection of materials placed in the appendix of the report. The written report was read with interest by staff members at all levels on both campuses. The visit and the written report have instigated changes in programs and policies at both institutions.

The "mini-sabbatical concept offers a variety of benefits to the home institution and the one visited. It has potential for self-improvement or in-service training for the person whose proposal is selected by the home institution. It is a self-evaluation process for staff members at both institutions. It is an excellent way to exchange ideas. Whether or not legislatures and Regents are reluctant to support full or half time sabbaticals, this is a good supplemental program for all concerned. MSU staff members and administrators, including the President, showed a great deal of interest in the short-term sabbatical concept and, since the visit, have made plans to adopt it. It would seem plausable that if institutions all over the country would adopt this program it would limit communication problems among educators in all disciplines and would have an enormous positive effect on all facets of education at the college and university levels. The SDSU "Mini"-Sabbatical Project has proven itself to be a viable continuing in-service activity and will serve as a reminder of Bicentennial activities of '76 for future generations.

Written (March 1976) by Dr. Les Foreman, Supervisor of Graduate Education, Division of Education, SDSU, Brookings, S. Dak. 57006